



South Asian News

Spring 2006

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Center for South Asian Studies
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
<http://www.hawaii.edu/csas/>

Comings and Goings...

From the Director, S. Shankar

South Asians have always traveled across the seas, despite restrictions of caste and religion. Sometimes they have taken sail out of a sense of adventure, or else out of necessity. Whatever the occasion for travel, South Asian migrations have enriched, challenged, sometimes troubled, societies across the globe. The Annual Symposium of the Center for South Asian Studies, to be held between April 19th and 21st 2006, will explore various aspects of this phenomenon through readings, invited talks, and panels. "Margins and Migrations: South Asian Diasporas across the World" will focus on various aspects of life amongst South Asian diasporic communities, but a special focus will be on the Pacific, the Caribbean, and Africa.

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South Asians in Muncie

Article by Himanee Gupta

Department of Political Science

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Muncie, Indiana's claim to fame is being "typical." Sociologists Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd carried out research there in the mid-1920s for their book, *Middletown*, a study of American community life. The Lynds included a disclaimer in their text, urging readers not to see Muncie as typical. But, over the decades, Muncie has come to be regarded as just that. *Middletown*, published in 1929, became a bestseller and, along with a follow-up study, published in 1937, established Muncie, under its scholarly pseudonym of Middletown, as what Ball State University's Center for Middletown Studies today describes as "a barometer of social trends in the United States." Numerous other

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Comings and Goings...

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The distinguished Indo-Fijian scholar, Brij Lal, will give the keynote address. Other invited lectures will be presented by anthropologist Aisha Khan, literary critic Gaurav Desai, and historian Charu Gupta. An exciting part of the symposium will be an evening of readings by New York-based poet Vijay Seshadri and Indo-Fijian fiction writer Mohit Prasad.

In other news, the Center for South Asian Studies is privileged to host Dr. Charu Gupta of Delhi University for the Spring 2006 semester as the Rama Watumull Distinguished Visiting Scholar. The Rama Watumull program is aimed at fostering links between Indian academics and academics based in the US. Over time, the program has proven vital in initiating and maintaining contacts between South Asianist faculty at UH and scholars based in India. Charu is at the University of Hawaii teaching (a course on gender and South Asia) and pursuing her own research. In the short time she has been with us, she has already proven a lively and invaluable resource to students and faculty colleagues alike. She has presented or will soon present talks to academic and community audiences on a variety of topics ranging from women and Hindu fundamentalism to migrations between South Asian countries.

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Equally stimulating has been the visit of Dr. Aslam Syed to UH-Manoa as the Freeman Scholar during the Fall 2005 semester. Dr. Syed's research brings a variety of different locations and topics together—from the contemporary politics of Pakistan to the historical contacts between the Middle East, South Asia and South East Asia. In his time with us, Dr. Syed contributed his knowledge and perspectives to student and colleague alike, including through the CSAS and community events.

So it has been a year of two exciting semester long visits and a host of other routine but vital activities—of sending promising students on scholarships to India, of sponsoring invited lectures by a wide range of academics, of co-sponsoring the public lecture of Ronen Sen, the Indian Ambassador to the United States, with the East-West Center, and a variety of other, similar, work. It has been a year of consolidation and even quiet growth. As South Asia itself has grown more important in the world for political and economic reasons, unfortunately not always good, there has been a growing awareness within UH of the need to be more attentive to South Asia. Will this translate into greater commitment to the Center for South Asian Studies? There is reason to be hopeful. ♦

Seeking J. Watumull Scholarship Applicants

The J. Watumull Scholarship for the Study of India was established to promote understanding of India through scholarship support of University of Hawai'i students with focused and well-developed proposals to study for a minimum of two months in India. The scholarship is generously funded by the Watumull Fund, and provides up to \$5,000 for students in various disciplines. Past recipients of the scholarship have been from such diverse fields as Visual and Performing Arts, History, Philosophy, Religion, and Political Science. Students from any University of Hawai'i department may apply.

Further information and applications are available online at

<http://www.hawaii.edu/csas/>

South Asians in Muncie

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academic studies followed the Lynds' works. So did marketing consultants, making the small town in East Central Indiana a site not only for market research and product testing but also a locality where national media would consult residents about their opinions on current events. The Center for Middletown Studies, itself created in the early 1980s, to compile and promote research on Muncie, calls the town "perhaps the most studied community in the nation."

The problem with these studies was the lens by which the scholars – and the nation, in a sense – see Muncie. Until recently, studies of Muncie focused mainly on the small city's white, Protestant community. African-Americans, Jews, non-European immigrants and communities of Indians/South Asians such as the one that my parents and their South Asian friends helped bring into being were ignored.

So, how does one write an ethnography about a community of Indian and other South Asian immigrants that took root in such a typical American community following the lifting of anti-Asian immigration restrictions in 1965? If the community does not exist – on paper, at least – how does one do research? Where is one's archive, one's source of knowledge?



Between August 2003 and April 2004, I interviewed thirty-one persons of Indian or other South Asian ancestry, all of whom had either lived in Muncie for at least a decade or had spent a significant part of their childhood growing up there.

The interviews were lengthy: Many lasted three or four hours. But, from the outset, I knew that my work was not "objective." Everyone I talked to was someone I either knew from childhood or had become acquainted with through my parents. Four of my interviewees were family members: my parents and my two younger sisters. Four discussion groups that I led – involving about fifty participants – took place in my parents' living room. Participant-observation often included events with which I had an intimate connection, such as a *sangeet* prior to my wedding in October 2005.

"So, Himanee," asked one interviewee, my sister, a Minneapolis resident born in Muncie in 1966. "When are you going to interview yourself?"

* * * * *

As I combed through interview tapes and worked up outlines and chapter drafts, memory – my memories – got in the way. One interviewee – a woman who was born in India but went to the same elementary and high schools as myself – to be identified in the project as Priscilla. Her story of how she came to be called Priscilla in elementary school reenactments of the Pilgrims crossing the Atlantic in the Mayflower reminded me of a sixth-grade Christmas concert when the principal requested that all of the "foreigners" come forward and face the rest of the students in singing "Joy to the World."

Another old friend, born in Karachi and raised in Muncie, recalled her "wild high school days" – sneaking out for a date, wearing clothes her parents disapproved of on the sly. As we laughed at her antics, I was reminded me of a time when fitting in meant guzzling cheap beer at a kegger without passing out and with the added burden of being an "Indian kid" of not letting your parents find out.

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Indian Classical Music Appreciation: (A Value Based Approach)

Article by Gopal Krishna
Department of Philosophy
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

On October 25, 2005, Gopal Krishna gave a presentation on Indian Classical Music at the Tokioka Room in Moore Hall. An introductory lecture on some fundamental components of Indian music was followed by demonstrations with audience participation. While Gopal and the audience sang, Asian Studies student Chandra Susilo accompanied on the violin.

The first section of the presentation gave a very brief historical and philosophical outline of the development of Indian Classical Music, both to introduce the musical form and also to highlight some of the aesthetic values embedded within it. The presentation then introduced some of the basic elements of the music, such as "tala" (based on rhythmic cycles and complex rhythmic patterns), "raga" (based on intricate melodic structures/scales/modes), "gamaka" (based on quaternary and microtonal ornamentations and oscillations around a note and between notes -- movement in pitch). The attempt was to introduce these elements as distinguishing features (e.g. distinct from similar concepts in Western classical music) as well as to present them as fundamental value laden concepts in their own right.

On a more provocative note, a thread throughout the presentation was to argue that there has been a shift in values from construing Indian Classical Music as a contemplative and improvisational art to a more modern conception of the music as a performing art. It was also an effort to awaken an appreciation that would preserve a more contemplative conception of the art by highlighting the values that

this would entail. Amongst others, some of the more aesthetic features that were discussed were related to notions of voice culture (What does vocal training involve? What is a "natural voice"?), perfection (What place do flawlessness and error have in differing notions of perfection?), improvisation (What place does a "creative impasse" have in a musical rendition? What is a preferred structure of a musical rendition, e.g. a rehearsed climax or a meandering exploration?), etc.

Rather than focusing on a theoretical presentation of musical concepts and musical theory, the presentation was constantly interspersed with musical demonstrations (vocal and violin). There was also a lot of audience participation to enhance the understanding and appreciation of some of the features presented and to make the session an enjoyable experience for all the participants. ♦



Above: Chandra Susilo plays the violin as Gopal prepares to sing.

South Asians in Muncie

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Few of my interviewees remembered the 1982 airing of a PBS documentary film series, or the crisis that ensued when what was to be the sixth film in the series was abruptly pulled out. The film, "Seventeen," depicted the gritty life of teenage drinking, smoking marijuana, and sexual promiscuity. The school board, a group of parents, and scores of letters from newspaper readers fought to squelch the film, fearing it would send the wrong idea about Muncie to the rest of the nation.

Muncie represents American community life – and, it appears, both scholarship and the town like it that way.

* * * * *

A desire to keep Muncie as Muncie revealed itself shortly after I arrived in August 2003. I drove through the city, strolled through its mall (which I could recall opening with much fanfare in 1970), and spent time casually listening in on conversations in restaurants and coffee shops, searching for my own barometer of social trends. I gained a sense that those in Muncie who were outside the South Asian community knew South Asians lived there. But how many? One, maybe two? Few gave it much thought.

As I began to share my project with Middletown scholars, as well as old childhood friends, skepticism surfaced.

"You're writing about the Indian community in Muncie," asked one Ball State University professor, a look of puzzled incredulity crossing his friendly face. "What Indian community?"

"The Indians in Muncie?" an old school friend echoed. "Where? Who? Isn't it just your family?"

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Cristina Bacchilega (English)

Cristina Bacchilega's "Media Translation in the Production of Legendary Hawai'i" appeared in a special issue of *Indian Folklife* 4.1 (2005): 5-8, edited by Sadhana Naithani on Folklore and Media.

Sankaran Krishna (Political Science)

Sankaran Krishna spent the academic year 2004-2005 in London, initially as the resident director of the UH Study Abroad program and latterly on his sabbatical. Besides continuing his ongoing research on issues relating to Partition at the India Office Library, he gave colloquia at Cambridge, SOAS, Durham, Aberdeen, and Goldsmiths. He also gave invited talks at conferences in Geneva, Madrid, Amsterdam, Beirut and Washington. (He is now determined not to travel anywhere farther than Makaha for the foreseeable future). His recent publications include a piece on the enclave character of India's success in the IT sector, and two forthcoming essays on the visibility of violence on the railways during Partition, and on the links between India's nuclear tests, middle class aspirations, and desired whiteness.

Roy Perrett (Philosophy)

Roy Perrett published "Hindu Ethics?" in William Schweiker (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Religious Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp.323-329.

Subramanian Shankar (English)

S. Shankar's novel *No End to the Journey* (Steerforth) was published in October 2005. He did interviews and readings from the novel in New York, Hawaii, Seattle and other locations, including the annual South Asian Studies Conference in Madison, Wisconsin, and KPFT Radio (Houston). He won a

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grant to spend a month during the summer of 2005 in Senegal at the NEH Summer Institute on African Cinema. Also during the summer he was in India giving invited lectures at Madras Christian College, the Center for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi, and CIEFL-Hyderabad. In November 2005, he gave a lecture at the East-West Center in Honolulu on class in African literature and film. In December 2005, he presented a paper entitled "Post-colonialism and the Problem of Translation" at the Annual Convention of the Modern Language Association in Washington D.C. And in March 2006 he was at the University of Washington to deliver a lecture entitled "Reading in the Vernacular: R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* and Its Film Adaptation."

Lee Siegel (Religion)

Lee Siegel's *WHO WROTE THE BOOK OF LOVE?* was published in August by the University of Chicago Press. He is currently resident director of the UHM Study Abroad Program in Paris.

David Stampe (Linguistics)
Patricia Donegan (Linguistics)

David Stampe and Patricia Donegan traveled to Hyderabad and Mysore during winter break. In December, they worked on the Sora language, an Austroasiatic tribal language spoken in Orissa, in Hyderabad. Osmania University helped them arrange to do their field work there (because the Indian police do not take kindly to Americans visiting the tribal areas). In return, Dr. Stampe and Dr. Donegan gave two lectures at the Osmania University Linguistics Department.

In January, they went to Mysore, where they joined European and Indian scholars to teach at the Winter School of Phonology at the Central Institute of Indian Languages. They presented two introductory forum lectures and two lectures on Natural Phonology. With their Sora language speakers, they also gave a field-work demonstration at the School. ♦

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Similar questions came from those persons whom I invited to join the project. One response from a longtime family friend who had come to Muncie in the early 1970s, was particularly illuminative of how South Asians also saw themselves as invisible. She said, in an ironic resonance with the Lynds' explanation for filtering out the non-white residents of Muncie as "statistically insignificant": "Oh good, I get to be a statistic."

* * * * *

"Do you think you'll ever be at peace with your past?"

That question came from a high school English Lit teacher, here in Hawai'i, who wanted to know more about what my dissertation was about.

Questions about the viability of a research topic can provoke anxiety. At the same time, the fact that those questions come up says quite a bit about how Muncie has been rendered typically American, and about the difficulty of seeing a particular place in a way that is other to how it has been conventionally portrayed. What the questions also show is that truth is not definitive but rather is crafted to appear definitive in order to maintain a particular, more-dominant point of view.

Writing back has made memory my archive, organizing not only the interview data but also the theoretical frameworks I chose to set up. Memory also changed the project, making it less a study of a South Asian community and more a comment of how discursively formed truths block out competing realities.

But memory is messy, and has a tendency to unsettle one's peace with the past. With that messiness, new questions arise: Is this good research? Or self-indulgence? Am I documenting "truth" or am I telling stories that could be attacked as minor – or, even, as "Seventeen" was, distortions of the "real story"?

Feminist historian Joan Wallach Scott addresses these workings of truth in *Gender and the Politics of History*. Critiquing E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, she argues that Thompson missed an opportunity to undertake a gendered analysis of the emergent class consciousness that he writes about because he did not look for gender. "If we were to attend to discourse rather than consciousness ... we would open new interpretative possibilities," Scott writes. The result of our research would be not, as Scott notes, "a unitary concept" but concept as a "field that always contains multiple and contested meanings (Scott, 1999, 88-89)." Could such an analysis lead us to ask how more-dominant meanings come to be naturalized over time, in scholarship and lived experience? And, perhaps, what might occur to denaturalize that experience, to re-map America, in a sense?

Looking within dominant truths for suppressed perspectives requires one to regard theory as a vigorous engagement with "reality." It often unsettles the mind, and brings back what was, at times, an ugly past.

Yet, it might yield a story that hasn't been told before. ♦



Above: The author and friends in Muncie

Spring Symposium 2006

The Center for South Asian Studies will be having its 23rd annual Spring Symposium from April 19th through April 21st, 2006. The theme this year is "Margins and Migrations: South Asian Diasporas across the World." Below are some of the speakers featured at this year's event.

Gaurav Desai is a professor at Tulane University in the Department of English and the Program in African and African Diaspora Studies. He recently published a book, *Subject to Colonialism: African Self-fashioning and the Colonial Library*.

Aisha Khan is a professor in the Department of Anthropology at NYU. Her most recent book is titled *Callaloo Nation: Metaphors of Race and Religious Identity Among South Asians in Trinidad*.

Brij Lal is professor and head of the Division of Pacific and Asian History in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at The Australian National University. His most recent book is titled *Bittersweet: The Indo-Fijian Experience*.

Mohit Prasad is a professor of Pacific/Postcolonial Literatures and Creative Writing at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. He has published two volumes of poetry, *Eyes of the Mask* and *Eating Mangoes*.

Vijay Seshadri is a poet living in Brooklyn. Originally from India, he has lived in various places in the United States. His work has been seen in *The New Yorker* and in his two published books, *Wild Kingdom* and *The Long Meadow*.

South Asian Play Coming in March 2006

The Center for South Asian Studies is joining hands with the local community group "Milun" (Association for Promoting South Asian Culture) to present a cultural program, "Jhankar" (melodious note), on Sunday, March 26, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., at the auditorium of the University of Hawaii's Arts Department. University of Hawaii students and community people from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka will be jointly presenting South Asian songs and dances. They will be assisted by some performances from Indonesia, Philippines, and Polynesia. Prof. Thomas Klobe, Director of the U.H. Art Gallery, will also do slide presentation entitled "Altars to God in South Asia."

Suggested donations are \$5.00 (general); \$3.00 (students). Additional information can be obtained from Radha Homay (949-3605) or Saleem Ahmed (371-9360).



Professor Aslam Syed, who is a faculty member at Quaid-i-Izam University (Islamabad, Pakistan), the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, PA), and Humboldt University (Berlin, Germany), was hosted at the University of Hawai'i as a guest lecturer in Asian Studies during the Fall 2005 semester, thanks to a grant from the Freeman Foundation Initiative.

Dr. Syed gave a number of exciting lectures on Islam during his stay in Hawai'i, to audiences at the university and at local religious organizations.

Rama Watumull Distinguished Visiting Scholar Charu Gupta

The Center for South Asian Studies is pleased to announce Charu Gupta as this year's Rama Watumull Distinguished Visiting Scholar for the Spring 2006 semester. This appointment is made available to a different visiting scholar every year through a generous grant from the Watumull family, in memory of Rama Watumull (1912 - 1953). Mr. Watumull was a community and business leader who attended the University of Hawai'i.



Dr. Gupta teaches in the History Department at Delhi University. She is also a senior fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi. This semester she is teaching in the UH Women's Studies Department. Her course is called "Gender Issues in Asian Society," and focuses particularly on gender issues in South Asia.

She has published a book, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public*, and is currently working on a second, about fisher folk and coastal disputes in South Asia. This will be the topic of her presentation at the upcoming CSAS Spring Symposium (April, 2006). Dr. Gupta also spoke at Revolution Books in February.

This is Dr. Gupta's first visit to Hawai'i, but not to the United States. Two years ago she was a visiting scholar at the University of Washington. She says that she is pleased to have found the students here both knowledgeable and eager to learn more about South Asia and gender studies issues.

The Rising: Of What -- The Company or the Nation?

Movie Review by Bed Paudyal

Department of English

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Ketan Mehta's 2005 blockbuster, *The Rising: Ballad of Mangal Pandey* is yet another addition to the Bollywood commercial films that exploit nationalist/anti-colonial themes. Featuring Amir Khan in the title role, which immediately recalls to the informed audience Khan's success with the 2001 *Lagaan*, the film translates into cinematic script the (hi)story of the 1857 Indian Mutiny. If *Lagaan* had scripted the Indo-British conflict in terms of the agricultural tax as well as through the popular sport of cricket, *The Rising* re-presents the mid-nineteenth century uprising of the Indian *sepoys*, popularly known to be inflamed by the use of cow and pig fat in the cartridges the Hindu and Muslim *sepoys* refused to apply their teeth upon, and codes it as the originary moment of the nationalist struggle for independence. By announcing the East India Company vanquished under the heel of the rising nationalist struggle and linking that directly with independence in 1947, the film seduces us into its nationalist closure by rhetorically denying the "truth" of the transmogrification of the Company into the present-day globalized capital.

The Rising begins and ends with the death by hanging of Mangal Pandey, the hero of the Mutiny, whose martyrdom initiates the Mutiny proper by rousing the people into rebellion against the British. The film's narrative voice tells us that the mutiny was repressed after a year but denies the import of this repression by linking the event in the chain of historical causation to the 1947 independence marked in the film by the visuals of Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi. What happens in the middle – the context, the players and the socio-cultural-political dynamics that led to the Mutiny – which comprises time-wise almost the whole of the film, is rhetorically sublated to the founding moment of the nation.

What happens in the middle deploys all the standard themes of the colonial/postcolonial discourse. The sati who is saved by a white man from brown men, the "untouchable" who is booed at amidst fear of loss of caste/religion, the introduction of the telegraph and its instrumentality for policing and control, and even the possible/impossible friendship between white man and brown man that reminds one of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* – all indicate that the film is highly informed of/about the (hi)storicity of its subject matter. Additionally, a certain reformatory impulse is marked by giving the "untouchable" subaltern sweeper the privilege of mocking the caste rhetoric.

However, like elite-nationalist historiography, the film robs the subaltern agency of the Mutiny by sublating the latter to the grand narrative of the nation. The triumph of the nation also masks the truth of the inscription of the film by globalized capital. If the forced prostitution/slavery of women for the pleasure of the British is rightly criticized by the film, the critique induces us to forget the commodification of woman-as-flesh-for-men's-gaze that the film does not hesitate to exploit in the songs/ musical. The definition of The Company as business par excellence that the film makes through Gordon, the underclass British Captain, and through the narrative voice, would stand equally true of the global capital today. But the truth of the continuity of the Company in the comprador capitalism of postcolony is bracketed by the device of the flashback. Both *within* the film in its fetishized representation of the nation and of the local color and *without* in its placing in the world as commodity for global consumption, the-Company-transmogrified-into-global-capital dictates the terms of representation of the film. ♦

Center for South Asian Studies Sponsored Events

The Center for South Asian Studies regularly sponsors talks by scholars in various UH Departments. These are some of the most recent events in our continuing series:

Anoop Mahajan (Linguistics, UCLA), May 2005

S. Shankar (English, University of Hawai`i) and
Gary Pak (English, University of Hawai`i), September 2005

Aslam Syed (Quaid-i-Izam University, Islamabad), November 2005

Charu Gupta (History, Delhi University), February 2006

Itty Abraham (Political Science, University of Illinois
at Urbana-Champaign), March 2006

Ronen Sen, Indian ambassador to the United States, March 2006

Purnima Bose (English, University of Texas at Austin), coming this April

Congratulations to the most recent recipients of
the J. Watumull Scholarship:

Gregory Dunn

Patricia Eidsmoe

Laura Guerrero

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Strategically located, and with a multicultural heritage, the state of Hawai'i has always been uniquely international in outlook. The people, traditions, and cultural milieu of this island state in the Pacific provide a strong and continuing bond with Asia.

Beginning with the establishment of the Oriental Institute in 1935 and an ongoing series of East-West Philosophers' Conferences, South Asia became an intellectual focus at UH. This emphasis continued with the establishment of the journal *Philosophy East and West* in 1951 and the Asian Studies Program.

The Center for South Asian Studies was created in 1985. Since then the objective of the Center has been to coordinate and integrate, by juxtaposing humanistic with scientific scholarship, and historical and contemporary data. The Center thus serves to illuminate specific questions of regional interest, and complements and bridges the disciplinary departments directly related to it.

The Center studies both past and present societies and cultures of South Asia and promotes faculty interaction across departmental lines to foster comparative and interdisciplinary research on the region. South Asia includes contemporary Afghanistan, Pakistan, India (including the Andaman and Nicobar Islands), the Maldives, Lakshadweep, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Tibet.

Margins and Migrations: South Asian Diasporas across the World

CSAS 23rd Annual Spring Symposium

April 19th-21st, 2006

Keynote: Brij Lal

Other Guest Participants:

**Gaurav Desai Charu Gupta Aisha Khan
Mohit Prasad Vijay Seshadri**

